

# ANGELS CAMP MUSEUM

## *The Henry Angell Story*

In the ensuing years of the Gold Rush most miners lived and worked as anonymous players in that epic unscripted drama. If they were lucky, they “saw the elephant” and survived to tell about it. Those who came first often left their names on the landscape as they pushed on in pursuit of the yellow stuff. In the case of Angels Camp, our name celebrates one of those early explorers, Henry Pinkney Angell.

Henry Pinkney Angell was born in Smithfield, Rhode Island on May 26, 1826. He was the youngest of eight children born to Rhode Island natives Charles Angell and Susan Westcott (Angell 1872:144). Henry must have had wanderlust in his blood or perhaps he had heard the “call of the sea,” because by 1847, at the age of 21, records indicate that Henry was in Monterey, California as a guest at a ball given by American Consul Thomas Larkin (Dickerson 1904:22). Angell is mentioned in several accounts as being at Sutter’s Fort and Monterey from February to May 1848 (Bancroft 1884).

By May of 1848, the news of the discovery on the American River had already reached Monterey and no one was spared from the epidemic of gold fever. Henry had likely joined a group of 91 adventurers, all with

ambitious plans to explore and claim their own virgin ground. Fortune finally smiled on the Carson-Robinson Expedition when they reached the tributaries of the Stanislaus River (Carson 1852). Sometime thereafter Henry may have joined Charles Weber's army of prospectors (Bancroft 1884) but by July, Henry found himself successfully working the placer deposits at the confluence of Dry Creek and the creek that would later bear his name (Limbaugh 2004:17). Henry wasted no time investing his newfound wealth into something more enduring. Opening up a tent store near Angels Creek, he established himself as the first merchant of the new camp, selling necessities to his once fellow miners. Angell's trading post was still going strong by mid-December 1848 and continued into 1849, now part of the growing camp known as Angels. Sometime in 1849 Henry sold his store to J.C. Scribner (Hittell 1885:19) and returned home to Rhode Island.

On September 6, 1849, Henry Pinkney Angell was issued a Seaman's Protection Certificate in the Customs District of Newport, Rhode Island (U.S. Nativity Certificate #37 Mystic Seaport database). Perhaps he felt he would need it if he ever returned to California or maybe he planned to return all along. According to the 1852 California State Census, Henry is recorded as a miner residing in Calaveras County.

For the next 45 years of his life, Henry would pursue his California dream with mixed results. It appears he often flirted with success but never quite achieved it. The *Sacramento Daily Union* on June 4, 1855 recorded:

“The Great Cave – Messrs. Angel & Magee, the liberal and enterprising proprietors of the great natural curiosity, and of the 'Cave House,' have made extensive preparations for the reception of guests. Parties from various parts of the State visit them daily. The road thither is in very good condition.”

Apparently Henry's plans took a turn as it is recorded in the Calaveras County Book of Records that he and McGee sold their interest in the Cave House Hotel to a Joseph Smith for \$4,000 on May 23, a week and a half before the ad ran in the *Sacramento Daily Union*. This turn of events may have been brought on by a mechanic's lien filed in the County on Sept. 12, 1854 for \$1,527.93 against Angell and McGee by William Dennis & Co. for the expense of lumber and improvements to the cave (*Las Calaveras* 1987: 27).

As late as 1890, 64 year old Henry apparently still maintained some status in the community as he was appointed Election Board Supervisor by the Calaveras County Supervisors. Successful or not, he would return many times throughout his life to where he started as a humble miner. When Angell's mining partner Henry O'Dell died with nothing to his name, Angell sold all of his personal belongings to pay for a decent burial for his friend. Not long after, on March 17, 1897, Henry Pinkney Angell passed away at the age of 71. His obituary in the *Calaveras Prospect* sums it up:

“Mr. Angel was highly respected by all who knew him and had not a known enemy in the world. Through the efforts of Steward Burgess a subscription was raised and the remains were interred in a proper manner in the People's Cemetery on Saturday.”

Even though his luck was fleeting, Henry Pinkney Angell's claim to fame will always be with us as long as we remember his name.

*Written by Jim Miller*

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